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Figure 1
RIBERA. ST. JEROME. FOGG ART MUSEUM



Figure 2
RIBERA. VISION OF ST. JEROME. NAPLES

PAINTING OF SAINT JEROME BY RIBERA

THE acquisition, in 1920, of such a broadly representative and masterly specimen of Ribera's achievement as the Saint Jerome which is the subject of this notice constitutes an important step in the development of the Fogg Museum. The function of the Fogg Museum is necessarily double. Not only must it fulfil the purpose of an ordinary museum of art, but, since it is attached to a university, it must in a very special sense assist the student. The aim of the directors has therefore been to collect objects that will afford aesthetic enjoyment, and at the same time will illustrate, by their range, as many periods as possible in the history of art. The several Italian schools of the Middle Ages and Renaissance are already well exemplified, and a good beginning has been made in the art of other countries and epochs. With one or two exceptions, however, until recently there has been nothing to represent either the great school of Spain or the baroque period, the production of which has risen in our day to a new popularity. Ribera's Saint Jerome (Figure 1) goes a long way towards filling both lacunas.

On the top of the rock by which Saint Jerome stands, the painting is signed *Jusepe de Ribera español F.* and dated 1640. It therefore belongs to the period of his mature and most typical works. Paul Mantz, writing in the "Gazette des Beaux

Arts" in 1865,¹ notes its presence in the collection of Count Pourtalès at Paris. In the standard monograph on Ribera by A. L. Mayer, published in 1908,² it is catalogued on page 188 as in the collection of the Baron Léon de Bussièrès at Paris and is briefly discussed on page 128. The canvas measures 49 inches in height and 38½ inches in width. Of the three iconographical phases in which Saint Jerome is usually depicted, as Doctor of the Church, as translator of Holy Scripture, or as penitent, he here appears in the last-mentioned character. Only half clad in a great expanse of drapery, the color of which is a typical baroque red, the old ascetic stands beside a piece of rock against a background of warm olive gray. In his right hand he holds as his usual attribute the stone with which he was wont to beat his breast; on his left arm rests another frequent symbol, the skull as an emblem of the nothingness of human vanities. Two well-worn books upon the ledge of rock remind us still that he was scholar as well as penitent. The half surprised and inquiring upward gaze, the attitude of listening, and the opening of the mouth in astonishment, may mean that Ribera was here thinking also of the subject called the Vision of Saint Jerome. While living the life of a hermit, he is said to have been vouchsafed an anticipatory vision of the final Judgment, in which he heard the

¹ 1865, I, p. 100.

² August L. Mayer, *Jusepe de Ribera*, Leipzig, 1908. Although Mayer evidently does not know of the date on the painting, he groups it with other works that were executed about 1640.

sound of the last trumpet. No angel with trumpet is seen, but the posture of the head and the expression seem to imply a supernatural experience.¹

The picture is typical both of the baroque and of Spain, first, in its extreme naturalism. The field of art throughout Europe in the sixteenth century had been largely monopolized by a lifeless classicism, which did little but imitate the achievements of Raphael, Michael Angelo, and the other great Italian masters of the High Renaissance, and became more and more enervated with each repetition. Having evolved a series of inviolable aesthetic canons, classicism imposed upon all masters the same generalized figures, the same pseudo-ancient draperies, and the same vapid gestures. An inevitable reaction had begun in Italy at the end of the century, championed by Caravaggio. In religious painting it assumed the form of a naturalistic treatment of the sacred themes and of an individualization of the generalized types cultivated by the classic Mannerists. Thus it was that a greater naturalism came to be one of the distinguishing traits of the baroque style that is generally characteristic of the seventeenth century. Ribera's first teacher, Ribalta, imported the reaction into the Spanish school of Valencia. Ribera himself, born at Játiva near Valencia about 1588, spent his later student years in Italy and finally took up

¹ The subject of the Vision of Saint Jerome is unmistakable in several other paintings and etchings by Ribera, which include the representation of the angel and trumpet. The most celebrated rendering is in the Naples Gallery (Figure 2).

residence at Naples, where he continued to live until his death in 1652 and thus came into even closer touch with the new movement; but despite his expatriation, he remained in essence a thorough Spaniard, justifying in a very real sense the *sobriquet* that the Italians bestowed upon him, "Lo Spagnoletto," and he grew to be one of the greatest Spanish exponents of the naturalistic revival. Inasmuch as the art of Spain had from its earliest days tended towards the naturalistic, this feature of baroque painting was more emphasized in the Iberian peninsula during the seventeenth century than in Italy itself. Ribera's Saint Jerome betrays the degree to which naturalism could be carried. The head and nude parts of the body are painted with the utmost faithfulness to actuality of which the brush is capable. From the standpoint of physical beauty, this exactitude is not wholly agreeable. In rebellion against the idealizations of classicism, artists had now purposely turned to the ugly and revolting. Ribera, like Zola, conceiving realism as one-sided and as having to do chiefly with the obnoxious aspects of existence, revels in the opportunity afforded by such a subject as the Saint Jerome to paint the less attractive head and flesh of old age and to show that he is not afraid of the strongly accentuated wrinkles and furrows of the withered epidermis. This, indeed, is only one among many representations of Saint Jerome by Spagnoletto. If we once grant the principle of extreme naturalism and its application to unpleasant themes, there is room for naught but

admiration for the consummate dexterity of draftsmanship and modelling with which the master achieves his end. Ribera always brought his realistic skill to a climax in the countenance, sometimes purposely subordinating the rest by treating it in a rather summary fashion; here, although the body, draperies, and accessories are also most carefully painted, the head and expression have been the objects of particular effort.

Another aspect of the reaction was an abandonment of the monotonous lighting of classicism for the so-called *tenebroso* manner, according to which the greater part of the canvas is plunged in deep shadow and patches of high light are sharply relieved against it. The violent but impressive chiaroscuro thus created was relished by the theatrically minded baroque masters, especially by Ribera. Occasionally during the years of his maturity and even of his old age he emancipated himself wholly or in part from this mannerism. The Saint Jerome reveals it only in a very moderate form: the strong light upon the figure is vividly contrasted with the neutral background, and the illuminated face with the dark hair, but the color of the background is far removed from that profundity or sometimes even absolute blackness of shadow in which Ribera often indulged himself.

The virtues of the baroque here receive a powerful manifestation. Critics have acquired the easy habit of stigmatizing the religious expression of the baroque as false and mawkish, and it cannot be denied that, compared with the robust faith em-

bodied in the artistic production of the Middle Ages, the sentiment of the painting and sculpture of the seventeenth century was unfavorably affected by the somewhat artificial and hysterical Christianity of the Counter-Reformation. But compared with the cold or insipid religious feeling of the later Renaissance of the sixteenth century, the devotion incorporated in the art of the Catholic Reaction exhibits a return to a real and more vigorous piety. A greater and more sincere fervor attaches especially to the art of Spain, as the stronghold of the Counter-Reformation and the hearth of the Jesuits. The mystic exaltation of Ribera's youthful saints, masculine and feminine, is likely to border on the sickish, but in his more aged champions of the faith, as in the Apostles of the Prado and here in the Saint Jerome, the expression is restrained and emanates from genuine convictions. There are other analogies between this figure and the series of Apostles, particularly the desire to attain what to the artist of the seventeenth century was the *summum bonum*, the impression of the grandiose. The superb realization of such a purpose constituted perhaps the most distinctive and memorable achievement of the baroque. In these single figures the effect is secured through the majesty of the forms but especially through the broad and imposing sweeps of drapery.

The Saint Jerome represents Ribera not only at his best but also at his most Spanish. The ethnic type, the emphasized naturalism, the intensity and sincerity of the religious experience, belong to the

aesthetic tradition of the peninsula. In certain respects, indeed, Ribera here seems to approach the manner of Velázquez. The relationship is none the less real because it is so intangible. If forced to be more specific, one might point to such factors as the color and simplicity of the background, the tones and free handling of the books, the rather impressionistic technique of the hair and beard, above all the facile mastery of the tricks of the trade. Since these qualities are more characteristic of Velázquez and are given by him a more definite and higher expression, and since they do not show themselves in so pronounced a form in the majority of Ribera's other works, it appears likely, if any influence existed, that in this instance it was exerted by the younger artist upon his older contemporary at Naples. The influence that certain pictures of Ribera may have had in developing the naturalism and chiaroscuro of Velázquez' first period would now be reciprocated. But it is hard to see how Lo Spagnoletto at Naples could have become acquainted with the style of the court painter at Madrid. Possibly no influence is to be assumed, and the analogies may be the result of similar artistic conditions and of the aesthetic instincts of the race.

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